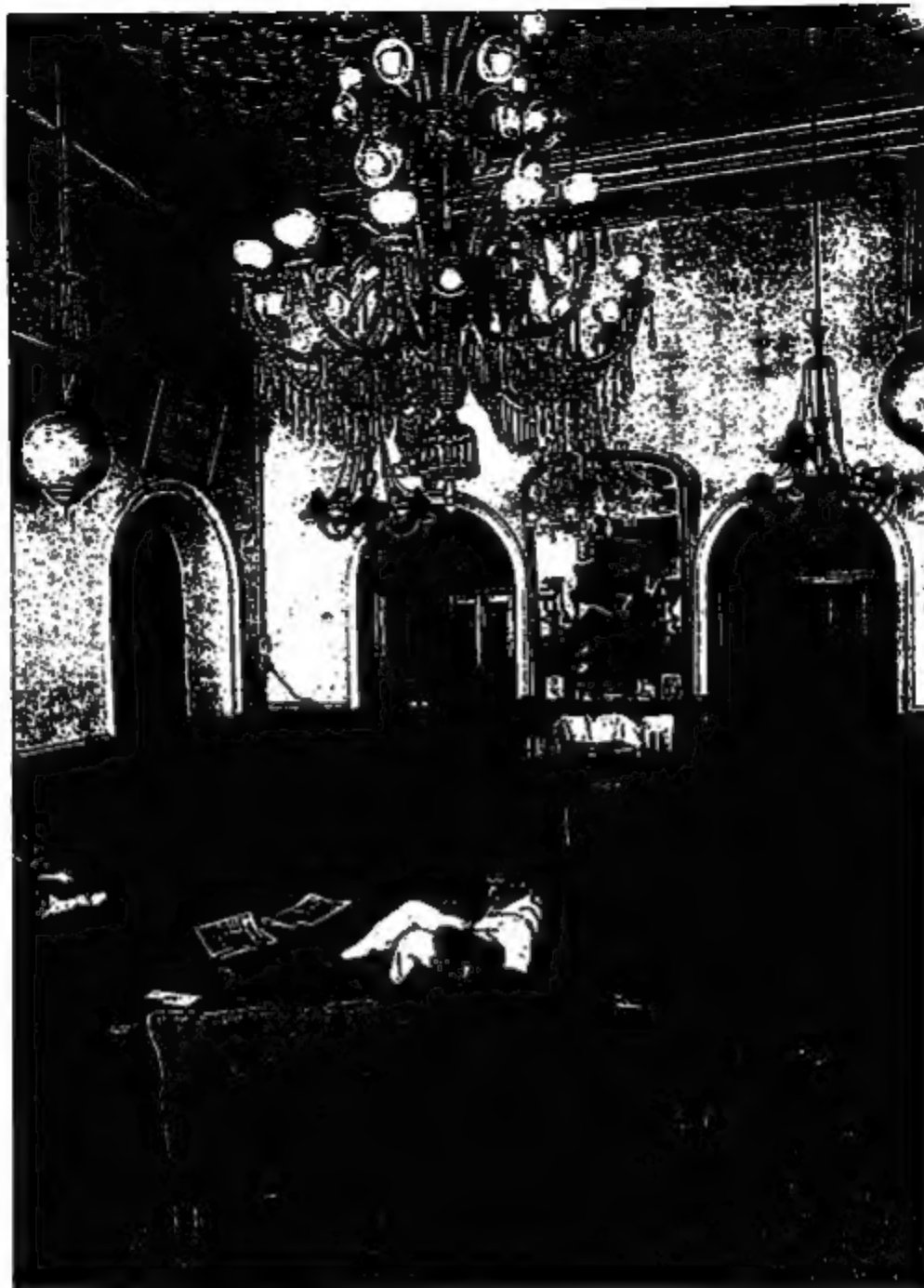


JUNE 1992

India

PERSPECTIVES





rich ingredient of our environment and aesthetics, but an important witness to our cultural, sociological and historical past.

Pavan Varma's text and, more especially, Sondeep Shankar's photographs are eloquent testimony to the speed and ruthlessness of this destructive process. It is only 350 years since Emperor Shahjehan conceived his new capital and already it is gone. Soon only books like this will remain to bear witness to what used to be.

Pavan tells us in his preface

that the book emerged from weekend rambles and it is a weekend book; much lighter than his Ghalib. The chapter heads of Urdu verse are beautifully apposite and evocative, but the text leaves one wanting more. With questions as well as regrets.

In the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam,

"...the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshed

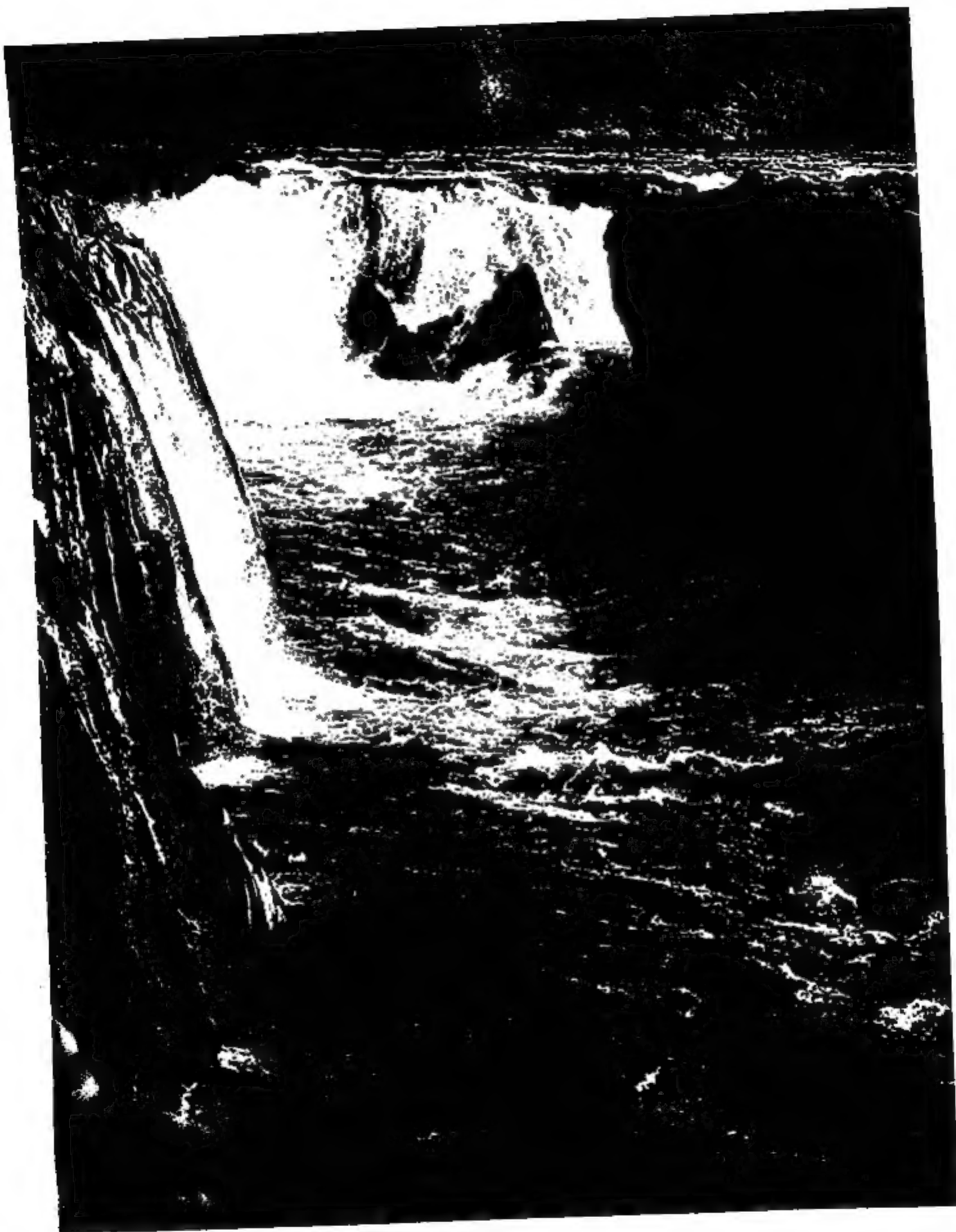
gloried and drank deep."

Alas, in the debris and clutter

of contemporary Shahjehanabad there are no lions. Pie-dogs, and the ubiquitous cockroach reign supreme and every day the bulldozer strikes and the disco din of yet another video parlour displaces one more family of courtly ghosts, the faint echoes of sitar music, ankle bells and Ghalib's verse. ♦

MANSIONS AT DUSK - The Havelis of Old Delhi by Pavan K. Varma; Photographs: Sondeep Shankar; : Published by Spantech Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992.

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Back Cover: Snow bound Shimla Kailash Rail Line. Transparency by B.S. Gill.

Sikkim's idyllic grandeur

TEXT ■ BRIG. CHANDRA B. KHANDURI

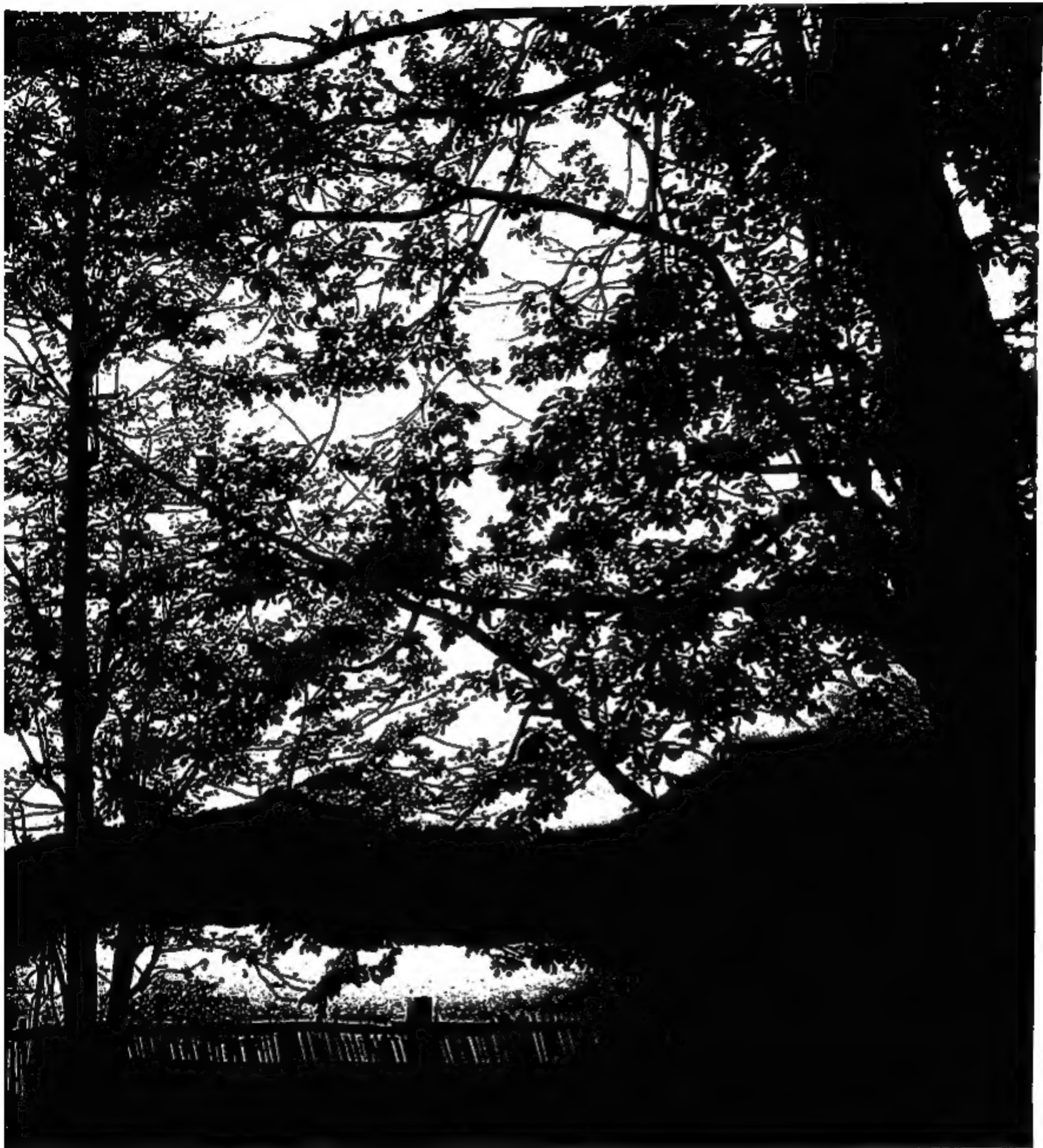
PHOTOGRAPHS ■ HEMANT K. UPPAL

May marks the end of spring elsewhere in the country. But in Sikkim it is a period of maximum bloom. Rhododendron and other flowering shrubs, orchids, turn the countryside into a landscape of colour; spread a natural aroma and extend its beauty. Dotted against the backdrop of fresh snow on higher altitudes, Nature undoubtedly is at its best here.

As one drives up the Singtam-Gangtok road that winds parallel to the formidable River Teesta, colourful jungles adorn the countryside. Teesta starts as a snow trickle from underground snow marsh of Giagong plateau in North Sikkim at an altitude of 15,000 feet and swells into a



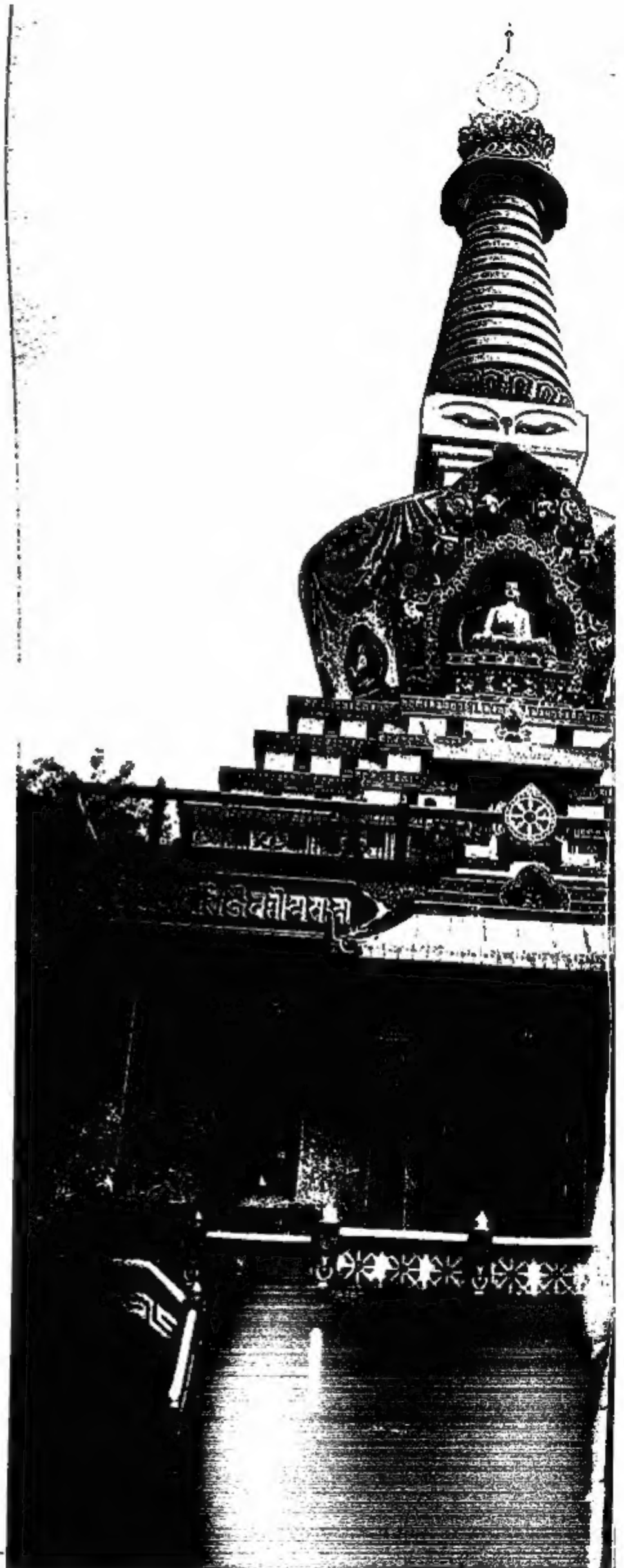
Early morning at Signal's Men, Gangtok



mighty, yet tranquil river near Sevoke. Here is a countryside that abounds in birds of all species - a dreamland of Dr. Salim Ali, the famous ornithologist.

Drastic locational weather changes are common in Sikkim. So prominent is their effect that a set of parallel ridges, just a few hundred meters apart, have different vegetations. The eastern ridge may have no vegetation whilst its sister ridge on the west may be a green one.

Gangtok at 5,000 feet is a pretty place with still prettier people. The constant cool breeze of the Kanchenjunga and lesser mountains seems to strike the face of the locals into crimson beauties. Gangtok is a modern town too. It hums with life. It is healthier than most Indian hill towns. It has its own blend of culture, a blend of Buddhist culture of the Lepchas and the Hindu of the Nepalese of lower altitude.







Orchids

The result is a fine amalgam of secularism with tolerance for each other.

As one drives up the Nathu La road, the beautiful lake of Chhangu fills one with awe and wonder. Its deep emerald water is disturbed only by the snow flakes or the playfulness of the snow trout. Life is more colourful in Nathu La, the fabled pass through which trade has had carried on between India and Tibet for the millenium. Nehru had laid a milestone here with the hope of making it into a 'pass of peace'.

In Nathu La, one is often surprised to hear a "Jai Hind" from a PLA (Chinese) soldier, who is occasionally joined by an officer (perhaps a woman commissar) to further enquire "Kaisa hai sathi?", "Aap ka beta, beti kaisa hai" (How are you friend? How are your children?). It is to be seen to be believed. The Chinese have travelled three decades beyond the 1962 bitterness! ♦



Ismat Chughtai, undoubtedly, was the *prima donna* of Urdu fiction. When she appeared on the literary scene in 1940s with a bang, everyone had to sit up and take notice. And this continued throughout her literary odyssey spanning over four decades. She either evoked high admiration or strong condemnation. No one could afford to ignore her or be indifferent to her. She was a born fighter and neither time nor age could blunt her fighting spirit or her razor-sharp wit. Born in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, in 1915, she passed away only a few months ago.

Ismat's milieu was the Muslim middle class of Uttar Pradesh in the first decades of this century. Her father was a Deputy Collector who moved from Badaun to Agra and then to Aligarh. Ismat observed watchfully the ambience of Muslim families of doctors, professionals, civil servants and lawyers. Though this class accepted western liberal education in a limited way, it was still ritual-ridden and tradition-bound. Another aspect of this phenomenon was that the liberating influence of education did not percolate deep down in these families. Women were denied any significant social role and the whole *raison d'être* of their life was limited to child-bearing and domestic chores. They led a claustrophobic

life within the four walls of the house. As was only inevitable excessive restrictions, segregation of sexes, sexual inhibition and incompatibility in marriages gave rise to another set of social malaise like illicit love, sexual exploitation of young girls and widows, homo-

sexual and lesbian tendencies and so on. A kind of Victorian hypocrisy vitiated social relations. Ismat was the product of this historical moment. Her first novel *Tedhi Lakeer* (A curved Line, 1943) incisively depicts all these social evils as they operated in the society through the



H U G H T A I

Prima Donna of Urdu fiction

■ M. ASADUDDIN

عصمت چغتائی
ضدک



لیکچریشنل بک اؤن ٹی گرہ

central character Shammon, and her school fellows and teachers at Aligarh. Though Ismat wrote four other novels - *Ziddi*, *Masooma*, *Saudai* and *Dil ki Duniya* - dealing with different aspects of a woman's life, *Tedhi Lakeer* was certainly a *tour de force* in its forthright acknowledgement of female sexuality and its compelling account of sensibility under repression. Inevitably it became a reference point for those who looked for a literature that would acknowledge a new set of personal, social and literary priorities that would take Urdu fiction into new horizons.

Ismat also wrote short stories for children. After her marriage in 1942 with Shaheed Latif, a film producer and director, she was drawn to the film world of Bombay and wrote scripts for quite a few films including the script of *Garam Hawa* which is known for its devastating indictment of the partition of the country in 1947.

Ismat's fame today rests primarily on her virtuosity as a writer of

short stories. She has written over a hundred stories, her better known collections being *Ek Baat*, *Choten* (1942), *Kaliyan* (1945), *Chhuimui* (1952) and *Do Hath* (1955). Her name, along with that of Saadat Hasan Manto, is usually associated with the effort of Urdu story to divest itself of its preoccupation with the world of romance and fantasy and give it the hard and convincing texture of authenticated facts of real life. From a study of her stories one can trace the evolution of Indian women from a faceless existence through education and emancipation to a far more 'realised' life.

The double standards practised widely in matters of sexuality, tilting the scale of justice heavily against women, has been graphically depicted in a number of stories. Specially remarkable among them are *Lihaaf* and *Badan Ki Khushboo*. Begum Jan in the former story is a young and extremely beautiful girl who is married to the nawab who is of 'ripe years' and



'very pious'. She withers away in the confinement of the mahal while her husband spends his time with 'fair-complexioned, slender-waisted' boys. Out of sheer desperation she turns to Rabbu, her maid, who provides an outlet for her suppressed sexual desires. The greatest strength of the story lies in its subtle combination of the facetious and the serious and its ambivalence that arises from the contrast between the speciously calm external aspect of things and the turbulent undercurrent. The story evoked a lot of heat and dust. *Badan Ki Khushboo* depicts a still seamier side of the mahal tradition where blooming village girls were employed as maids to the nawabzadas to initiate them into the intricacies of sex and when they became pregnant, they would be dispatched post haste to their villages to disembowel themselves and return alone to breast-feed the initiatee's legitimate offsprings. When a particular young nawab really fell in love with his maid, Halima, the whole clan became horrified. All hell broke loose and the young lover was disowned.

Ismat's brother, Azim Baig Chughtai, a humorist and satirist of some reputation, introduced her to the best in the world of short stories- Tagore, Chekov, Maupassant, O. Henry etc. It is

through her acquaintance with these writers and her acute power of observation that she almost perfected the art of creating living characters through the minimum of brushstrokes. Some of her stories like *Chauthi Ka Jora* and *Nanhi Ki Nani* are classics of their own kind and merit comparison with the best of Tagore, Chekov or Premchand.

Ismat is intimately related to the corpus of Indian literature that represents female consciousness. She is one of the four pillars of modern Urdu fiction - and other three being Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander and Saadat Hasan Manto. However, among the four, she is the most natural writer - effortless, spontaneous and uninhibited - untouched by any artifice or cliché. The language used in the stories is that of everyday speech - idiomatic, pert, racy and smart with a liberal sprinkling of specifically female expressions. With the help of this language which is incredibly powerful in suggestiveness she takes head on a whole barrage of cultural assumptions that perpetuated the status quo in all its benighted sterility. Her tongue-in-cheek mode interspersed with brilliant repartee, wit and irony makes her stories immensely enjoyable. ♦

The author teaches English at the Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

India and the new world order

■INDER MALHOTRA

Like individuals disorientated by jetlag, nations are finding it hard to come to grips with sudden and sweeping changes in the world. These are doubtless staggering in both scale and speed. In fact, they boggle the mind.

For over four decades after the end of the Second World War the international power structure had remained largely as the Big Powers had ordained it to be at Yalta. This was so despite wholesale decolonisation (rapid at first but painfully slow in surviving pockets of imperial and racial intransigence), the Chinese revolution and the startling economic progress of the two countries defeated in 1945, Germany and Japan.

With Yalta had coincided the dawn of the nuclear age. The subsequent spread of nuclear terror made a clash of arms or a hot war between mighty nations virtually unthinkable. But this in no way diminished the fury of the global Cold War which became the central

reality of the post-war world practised by two power blocs, led by the United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union.

Now, in less than three years after the demolition of the Berlin Wall, not by the governments concerned but by the people, the Cold War has become a thing of the past. What is more, this has not happened as a result of *detente* between the two power blocs. The Cold War has ended because of the retreat of the Soviet power, the rout

of the Communist ideology, the winding up of the Warsaw Pact and finally the disintegration of the Soviet Union as we have known it. The old, bipolar world has gone apparently for good.

This, combined with the swift victory of the U.S.-led military coalition in the Desert War, has given rise to the belief that the world, from now onwards, is going to be a unipolar one. The overblown American rhetoric and the pathetic cries of abject dependence on the



U.S. emanating from whatever is left of the Soviet Union, have strengthened the concept of a unipolar world in the making.

And yet this concept, though not utterly preposterous, is so flawed as to be inaccurate, to say the least. Undoubtedly, the U.S. today is the mightiest nation militarily. But it should not be overlooked that even the Russian federation, to say nothing of the Commonwealth Boris Yeltsin has managed to rig up, has enough nuclear might to destroy the United States.

Moreover - and more importantly - America has ceased to be economically pre-eminent. Despite reassuring noises from the White House no American is in any doubt that things would get a lot worse before they can become better. And this is happening at a time when the limitations of military power are becoming increasingly manifest and the economic might is turning out to be truly decisive. The situation is vastly more complex than the glib talk of *Pax Americana* makes it out to be. Indeed, even the prediction of a new world order falling into place in the near future seems

premature. The old order may well be dead. But there is no knowing when the new one will be born or whether it would be born at all. We might end up with a grand world disorder.

It is in this context that the place of India or any other country in the still emerging world order has to be discussed. But before doing so, one important point of great contemporary significance ought to be made.

The visit to this country by Premier Li Peng of China has enabled him and his Indian host, P.V. Narasimha Rao, to make it clear to the wide world that the two countries, speaking for 40 per cent of the globe's population, are firmly opposed to the world order being made the exclusive preserve of any one country or a small group of countries. They demand that any future world order must be fair and equitable to all nations, big or small, strong or weak.

In doing so, the Prime Ministers of India and China have taken an unexceptionable and commendable stand. Others, hopefully, would endorse their sentiment and through such institutions as the NAM, G-77 and indeed the U.N. try to promote their underlying objective. But that having been said, it must be added that at every step the situation has to be looked at realistically, not with rose-tinted glasses.

For instance, no one should run away with the impression that



Firework in the sky over the Brandenburg Gate as thousands of East and West Germans celebrate the new year

China is out to lead or join a crusade against the United States or is looking for "strategic allies" for this purpose. China, which was happy to be a "strategically" of the United States only a few years ago, has many differences with the U.S. But the Chinese are sorting out these discords, despite an occasional show of defiance, with great skill and sophistication which is worthy of emulation. Anyone who fails to



African National Congress President, Nelson Mandela, at the Press Conference in Johannesburg, where he announced that he and his wife Winnie were to separate after 34 years of marriage

perceive that China's paramount objective in its dealings with the United States is to secure every year its Most Favoured Nation status in trading matters is bound to reach very misleading conclusions. Against this backdrop India's position, options and role in the emerging world order should not be too difficult to delineate with reasonable confidence.

In the first place, India may suffer somewhat in relation to those powers which have both nuclear weapons and a permanent seat in the U.N. Security Council with the right to veto. A careful reading of the speech by the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, just before his latest visit to China, would under-



Members of the United Nations Security Council voting to implement sanctions against Libya for their refusal to surrender to the United Nations.

line how important these two instruments of power continue to be. Even so, India's power and potential are not negligible.

In fact, India is the second most populous country in the world, occupying a very strategic location in the heart of the Indian Ocean, straddling West Asia and South-East Asia. India also has the world's third largest reservoir of highly trained scientific and technological manpower. In conventional terms, it is the fourth largest military power. It was the sixth nation to detonate a nuclear device, though for a purely peaceful experiment, way back in 1974. Its space programme places it in the top seven countries in that league and it is among the first ten industrial nations. More important than past performance is future potential.

Here the most vital single factor - in a world where the Gospel according to St. Marx has failed and St. Market seems to have become the messiah everyone is looking up to - is the size of India's market. Despite its poverty and problems, this country has 150 million people with the living standards and purchasing power of the Italians.

The belief that in a world without the Cold War, non-alignment and NAM have become irrelevant is as flawed as the doctrine of a unipolar world. The essence of non-alignment is independence of judgement. In that sense, non-alignment would always remain relevant and resonant. India's leading position among the non-aligned will, therefore, always strengthen its bargaining capacity.

Altogether, therefore, India is not a helpless spectator to whatever may be happening in relation to the new world order; it is a substantial actor in that drama.

If there are certain features of the world situation which are not to our liking, a number of other things have happened to conform to our wishes which makes our task less onerous than it might have been. A number of regional conflicts, including the one in Cambodia, have been resolved. Apartheid is on the retreat. There has been a massive reduction in the strategic nuclear arsenals of both sides and the short-range nuclear weapons are being given up and destroyed. The logic of this situation is not the perpetuation of the inequitable and ineffectual NPT but a phased and systematic progress towards a world without nuclear weapons. A precise plan for this purpose has been on the anvil of the U.N. ever since Rajiv Gandhi presented it to the world body in 1988.

Fears that India's arm might be



Prime Minister Narasimha Rao meeting Chinese Premier

twisted by those who want everyone to sign the NPT on the dotted lines are grossly exaggerated. This country has stood its ground even when its plight was worse than today. It has no reason to give in now. However, rather than refuse to discuss any problem, we ought to be ready to offer alternatives, to widen the nuclear debate and establish the superiority of our ideas.

The same holds true of other



Peng and Mrs Li Peng at New Delhi

issues on which we might disagree with the U.S. or Europe or Japan or whoever.

Another significant advantage we have that ought to be made full use of: in all the talk about the new world order, pride of place is being given to democracy, pluralism, human rights and the quality of governance. On all these scores India's record is better than almost all countries of the Third World

and of many developed countries. There are, to be sure, complaints about alleged violations of human rights in the course of fighting terrorism and secession in Punjab and Kashmir. But here again Indian record can be shown to be vastly better than that of others.

India also shares several other interests common with those who are in the forefront of building up the new world order. Opposition

to terrorism and narco-terrorism is one. Resistance to Islamic fundamentalism is another.

The greatest challenge before the Indian state today is the massive, and unremitting military pressure - in support of merchants of terrors and secession - applied by Pakistan in Kashmir. It is gratifying that even those Big Powers which in the past used habitually to support Pakistan have begun to denounce Pakistani behaviour. They have also thrown their weight behind the idea that Kashmir must not be internationalised but settled through bilateral talks between India and Pakistan.

This is the base on which we should build. Nothing ought to be done to erode it. India is on a fairly strong wicket as far as the evolution of the new world order is concerned. Pressures and challenges there will be. But there is no challenge which cannot be met with skill and dignity. It is absurd to believe that the choice before us is to either submit to dictates meekly or to defy and decry others thoughtlessly. Give and take is the lifeblood of international diplomacy, where necessary agreements can be arrived at and even compromises made without compromising with national self-respect or surrendering supreme Indian interests. In other situations, we can surely dig our toes in with poise but without making raucous noise.

◆

The author is a noted journalist

An Artist on the rails

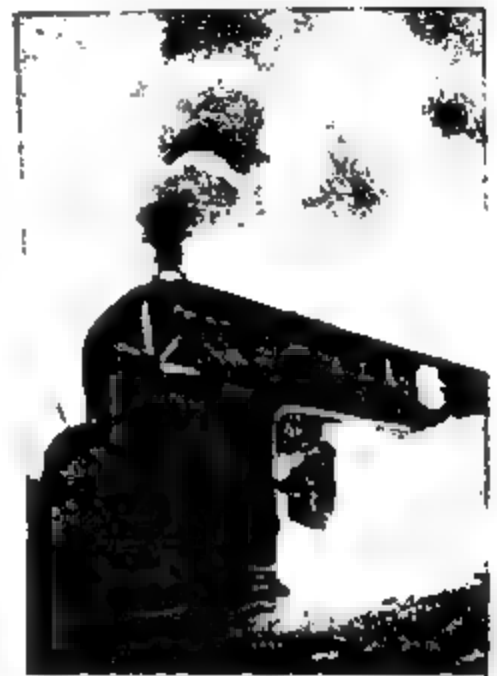
■ S.D. KUMAR

To be a painter and photographer of great merit, while actually pursuing a dull and drab career of locomotive driver in the Indian Railways, is a combination one rarely comes across.

But Balbir Singh Gill has made it possible. While traversing through the length and breadth of India, Balbir Singh has seen landscapes change from the mighty mountains to green fields, to meandering paths, to just rugged plains. And he has captured them all – on both his canvas and through the eye of his camera. The result? Simply fantastic!

Gill in fact is a born painter. He used to paint whatever he found nearest to him. He had no formal education in art, but the urge to paint was there even when he was a child. Born at Ferozepore in 1936, Gill started caricaturing his teachers, but was never encouraged.

He joined the Railways in 1953, and it appeared that the steam and smoke of locomotives would kill the artist in him. On the contrary, the daily trips in locomotives intensified his passion for painting.





Tunnel painting

He saw to it that the fleeting glimpses of nature were captured in his paintings.

He took to landscape painting seriously in 1962 when he was posted in the enchanting Kangra valley. His goal was excellence and he strove hard to achieve it. Because of the nature of his job, he is well travelled and has painted landscapes from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. One of his arresting works is the "Himalayan Queen" approaching a tunnel on the Kalka-Shimla track.

Gill says he has drawn inspiration from artists like Sobha Singh. He is an admirer of John Constable, Leonardo da Vinci, Durer, Rubens and Salvador Dali, besides many Indian artists.

Amongst Gill's creations is the painting entitled "Steam and Smoke". The painting depicts a charging train enveloped in a wreath of smoke. Another painting, "Snake Charmer" too is a pleasing blend of colour. So impressed were two British sisters, Lorna Madden and Teresa, that they requested him to paint them in traditional Indian attire – *saree, salwar-kameez* – draped by Gill's niece.

Apart from painting, Gill excels at sketching and photography. Sketching, he says, is the backdrop of



Ribbon dancer



Stems & Smoke



Past remembrances

an artist. His sketches are done on a unique self-embossed thumb impressioned paper. His sketches include portraits of Queen Elizabeth.

Gill has travelled extensively and held more than 20 exhibitions at various places, including Bombay, Shimla, Delhi, Calcutta and Chandigarh. He has won several awards, including the first prize awarded by the Himachal government and the Railways. He was awarded the state award in 1966, 1968, 1978 and 1981. His paintings adorn the walls of the Taj Art Gallery, Bombay, Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, the All India office and with private collectors in Australia, Japan, New Zealand, France, Canada, the USA, Switzerland and Germany. He is hopeful of one of his works finding its way to Holland.

Royston Ellis, an English author, makes special mention of Gill in his book, "India By Rail".

It is Gill who has sketched the author's portrait on the book.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Gill as an artist is destined to scale still greater heights while driving down the railway tracks! ♦

The author is a freelance writer



Bench view



Rugged terrain





Census of the lions

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS ■ JOGINDER CHAWLA

Lion, which only a few centuries ago ruled over vast stretches of land from Saudi Arabia, Iran to India, has not been able to withstand the growing avalanche of human population. Consequently, this majestic animal has been holed into Gir, a small area of 1400 sq km in Junagadh District of Gujarat. They were reduced to "not more than a dozen" in Gir in 1880 as reported by Col. Watson. The increase in the number of lions from 20 in 1913 to 284 in 1990 has a history behind it. When a report presented by Mr. Wallinger, the Chief Forest Officer

of Junagadh, revealed that hardly 20 lions were left in the Gir, Mr. Randall, the Chief Administrator of Junagadh, immediately banned the hunting of lion, thus starting a process of saving it from extinction. This blanket ban helped increase the population of lions to 50 in 1920. Of course all these estimates were based on rough collection of statistics provided by personal knowledge.

However, the first census of lions was undertaken in 1936. It was based on measuring pug-marks and physical counting at water-holes on the assumption that lions must come there to quench their





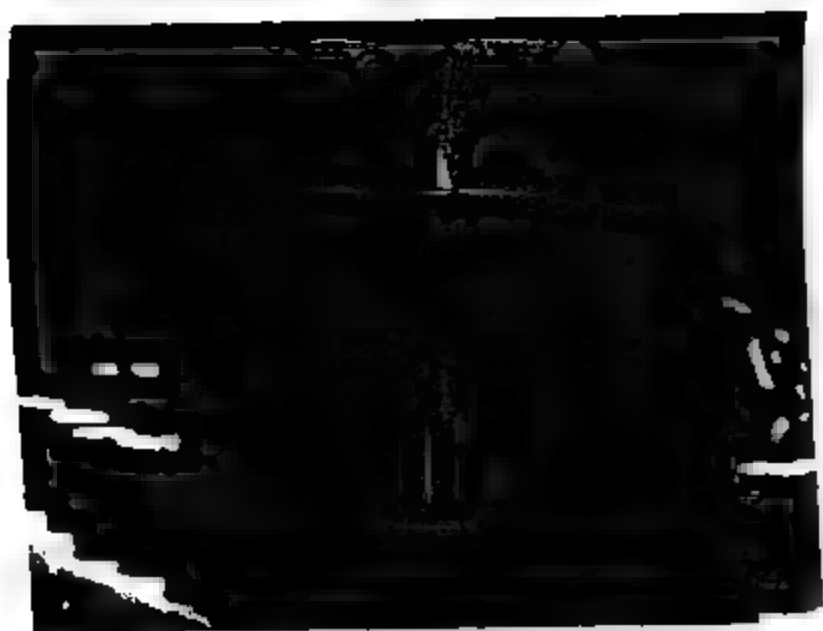
thirst once in 24 hours. The result was a booming number of 287 lions. In Independent India the first census was undertaken in 1950. The past practice of counting lions at water-holes was discontinued. Instead, the pug-marks and their measurements were taken into consideration. The number came down to about 225.

But the census of May 1974 differed from the earlier censuses in two matters. First, the counting of herbivores and other animals not counted so far was undertaken. The second change was that lions were offered live baits at waterholes and a colour dye was used to mark the animals to avoid duplication in

census. Also, the pug-marks of the right forepaw were taken. The count was just 180. It was considered to be the most accurate census. This practice continued till the latest 8th census which took place from the 8th to 14th May, 1990.

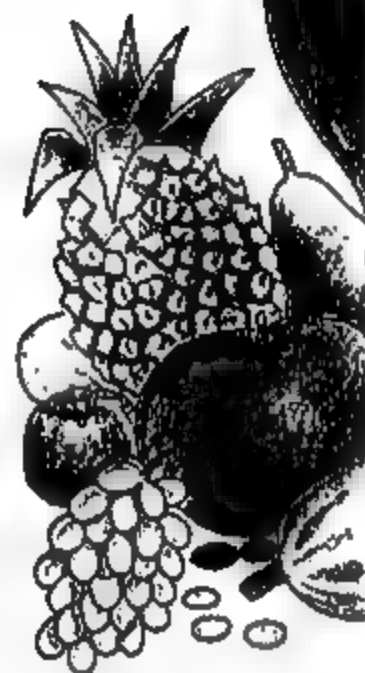
But the most surprising part of the census was shooting of lions by the former ruler of Bhavnagar state, Shiv Bhadra Singh, with his video camera. Earlier, he used to shoot with gun and had collected many stuffed wild animals in his house. Now, like him, many other ex-rulers have turned into protectors of the Wildlife. ♦

The author is a freelance photo-journalist



M A N G O

India's fruit ambassador



■ P.K. DE

The delectable Indian mangoes, the country's National Fruit, are universally acclaimed as the undisputed monarch of all fruits. The ripe golden yellow mangoes, occasionally in red and green hue, and the sweet, juicy pulp with tempting rich flavours are the natural choice of connoisseurs, in preference to all other fruits, all over the globe.

Basically, mango is a tropical fruit of the *Sumac* family. Its bo-

tanical name *Mangifera Indica* shows that it is indigenous to India since long. The English word *Mango* is derived from the word *Mangga* as it is called in Malaysia, or from *Mangkwa* in Chinese, the Tamil equivalent of which being *Manbay* or *Mangay*. In Sanskrit it is known as *Amra* wherefrom originates the word *Aam* - a name well-known in most parts of India. This legendary fruit has greatly influenced the Indian Culture as is evident from the relics found in excavations of the ancient cities of Mohenjodaro and

Harappa; on the gateway of Sanchi Stupa also (150 B.C.), a mango tree has been carved out in stone.

Internationally known as the Fruit Ambassador of India, mango is grown in an area of 2.5 million hectares of land all over the country. The states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra are the principal producers followed by Orissa, West Bengal, Assam and Goa. Over a thousand varieties of mangoes have been developed through the process of grafting and



mutation, each distinguished by its colour, flavour and subtle taste. Though basically a summer fruit, in the south the first crop of the season appears as early as in February, whereas, in the north some of the best varieties like Chausa and the giant Fazli arrive only in the months of August-September.

The total output of mangoes was nearly 24 million tonnes in 1989-90; that amounts to 65% of the world's production. In that year India exported over 36,000 tonnes of fresh mangoes worth Rs. 440 million to

40 countries including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, U.K. and Canada who are the main consumers. Besides, other mango products like canned fruit, pulp, juice, pickles and candies worth another Rs. 730 million were also exported. To attract foreign buyers and for the promotion of business travel to India, International Mango festival is held in New Delhi and

Saharanpur where hundreds of varieties of best quality mangoes are displayed, the most impressive of them being *Dussheri*, *Langda*, *Safeda*, *Rataul*, *Alphonso*, *Chausa*, *Zafran*, *Rajwala*, *Rumani* etc., each having its own special flavour, taste and charm.

The author is a freelance photo-journalist

India has been described by Benjamin Rowland, the famous art historian, as 'the shape of a great sealed funnel made for the inevitable retention and absorption of all the social and cultural elements poured into it.'

For thousands of years India has been attracting people from all over the world. Widely known as a land of diversities yet having an underlying unity, India is aptly described as 'epitome of the world.' Her physical beauty, political unity and cultural superiority have always left the visitors wonderstruck!

E.M. Forster in his "The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings" gives a vivid and interesting account of his second trip to India in 1921-1922. In one of his letters to his mother, he describes his experience of visiting the *Kumbh Mela* (Fair) in Allahabad: "I have one interesting thing to tell you about this week—the Bathing Fair. I think I told you that the Fair is on the holiest spot in India — where the Ganges and Jamuna meet. Unfortunately for all concerned, the spot is always changing. The Jamuna keeps fairly steady but the bed of the Ganges is between two and three miles broad and it wanders over it. One year it joined the Jamuna on this side — close under the Fort; this year it is far over the sand, on which, and not on the solid embankment, the Fair must be held. ... Roads have to be made, shops let, bathing boards and boats arranged and licensed — and then without any visible cause the Ganges changes its course, washing

India that dazzles

■ SHALINI MITRA



away the fair in one place and leaving it high and dry in another. At present the *Sangam* (holy place of confluence) is over a great backwater through which the pilgrims wade—shallow for most part, but containing one or two nasty holes and watercourses which have to be fenced and policed. The *Sangam* is only one foot deep, but it shelves suddenly to ten, and alters its position about twenty yards everyday. ...I ride to this Fair and back every morning on the kindest horse. ...This morning... we saw whole villages enter the water at once in long chains, like the Tonbridge ladies at the Diamond Jubilee (which was celebrated in 1897 to mark the sixtieth year of Queen Victoria's reign).

The "Bathing Fair" is the *Magha Mela*, a festival held annually at the time of the lunar month usually called *Magha* (late January – early February); its most auspicious moment occurs at the time of the new moon in the solar month of Kumbh (Aquarius). In "great years" the fair becomes Kumbh Mela, which marks the twelve-year cycle of Jupiter and is held triennially in succession at Hardwar, Prayag (Allahabad), Nasik and Ujjain, returning to Hardwar when Jupiter is in Aquarius and the Sun at the vernal equinox. E.M. Forster considered himself to be "lucky to have hit one of these great Fairs: there can't be anything like it elsewhere."

In "A Various Universe – A study of the Journals and Memoirs of British men and women in the Indian Sub-

continent (1765-1856)" Jemima Kindersley wrote in one of her letters to William Huggins about her visit to a few villages of Gujarat, which left a deep impression on her mind: "If I were to point out the most beautiful part of India I ever saw, I should fix upon the province of Guzerat. If I were to decide upon the most delightful part of that province, I should without hesitation prefer purgunnas of Brodera and Neriad. The crops in the other districts may be equal in variety and abundance, but the number of trees which adorn the roads, the richness of the mango topes round the villages, the size and verdure of the tamarind trees, clothe the country with uncommon beauty, such indeed as I never saw to so great an extent in any other part of the globe. There is, besides, a voluptuous stillness, if I may use the expression, in an Indian landscape, a serenity in the atmosphere, and a quietness on the road during a morning walk, or evening ride in the cool season, not generally known in Europe. I am almost tempted to say, that the lotus-covered lakes, and their over-shadowing banian-trees, have a more cheerful and brilliant appearance than in the surrounding districts; the sweet variety of the red, white, and blue lotuses gently agitated by the breeze, or moved by the spotted halcyon alighting on the stalks, with the rails and water-hens lightly running over the foliage, are altogether lovely."

Honoraria Lawrence, wife of Sir Henry Lawrence, a highly re-

spected administrator of Punjab in the 19th century, widely travelled in India. Vividly depicting the magnificence of the Lucknow city, she said: Lucknow with its white stucco, gilding and red paint has a very upstart look after the "melancholy and gentlemanlike" marble and desolation of Agra. Nevertheless, this is a curious and even splendid city. There is a curious dash of European architecture among the oriental buildings. Travellers have likened the place to Moscow or Constantinople. Gilded domes surmounted by the crescent, tall slender pillars, lofty colonnades, half Grecian looking houses of several stories high with pillars, verandahs, and windows, iron railings and balustrades entirely foreign in this country, cages of wild beasts and brilliant birds, gardens, fountains and cypress trees, the winding river Gomtee, with its bridges and boats, elephants, camels, horses, 'palkees'... all make a confused and very dazzling picture".

Again, impressed by the beauty of Taj in Agra, she wrote: "One ought to be for at least six months at Agra, to take it thoroughly in. My ideas are so sadly barbarized by the only great towns I have seen in Ireland and England that I cannot yet realise the profusion of white marble... Marble seems to have been as abundant and easily managed by the architects as pie-crust is by a pastry cook. The Taj! All I can say is that such a tomb would have been worthy of Isabella of Castille."

The author is a freelance writer



Uzbek children paint Indian themes

N Babamuradov, student of a Tashkent Arts School, was awarded the 1st Jawaharlal Nehru Scholarship for his outstanding paintings on Indian themes. This scholarship consisting of a cash prize of 10,000 Roubles and a monthly stipend of 300 Roubles for three years will enable him to pursue his further studies in arts. These paintings were part of an exhibition recently organised in Tashkent and all the works on display were devoted to Indian themes and reflected a close similarity between Uzbek and Indian cultures and art styles. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Asoke Mukerji, Consul-General of India, said the cultural closeness between India and Uzbekistan would be an important factor in furthering cooperation between the two countries. ♦



जवाहरलाल नेहरू





SWEET REASONABLENESS

TEXT ■ LAKSHMI KANNAN
ILLUSTRATIONS ■ TAPOSHI

And you thought there was no point in talking to someone like me, didn't you? Is that why you've distanced yourself from me?"

"What did you take me for, a plain stupid brute or something?"

"But I can understand you, only too well. I understand your desires, your ideas, your objectives...why, everything in fact."

"A marriage, after all, is a bond that can show up a hundred little cracks on its surface. Is that a good enough reason for you to take such



an extreme step, I mean your decision to... Look, please forgive me my mistakes, won't you? Forgive me."

"Just think it over. Give it one hard think. Even if I were to agree to this divorce after so many years of marriage, what are you going to achieve, all by yourself?"

"Sir, can I get you anything else? Perhaps a plate of finger chips? And another pot of hot coffee?"

"What?"

"Sir, I just wondered if I could get you some more hot coffee. And something to eat with it, may be?"

"But I've eaten," he said, glancing down at the plate on his table. It had some left-overs of the dosa that he had just wolfed down. He raised his head and said:

"Alright, get some finger chips and a plate of vegetable cutlets and a pot of hot coffee to go with it."

"Very well Sir, in a moment Sir," said the waiter, picking up the used plate. He sat for a while, staring at the retreating figure of the waiter. Then he pulled out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, lit one and sat waiting, blowing out the smoke. He then leaned forward in the chair, lowered his head slightly and continued again in the same low voice:

"I gave you total freedom, to do whatever you wanted to do, to be a working woman, to earn your sal-

ary, to dress as you please, and to go gallivanting about with your friends... what more do you want?" he asked, smiling.

"Tell me. You can tell me. You needn't hesitate.

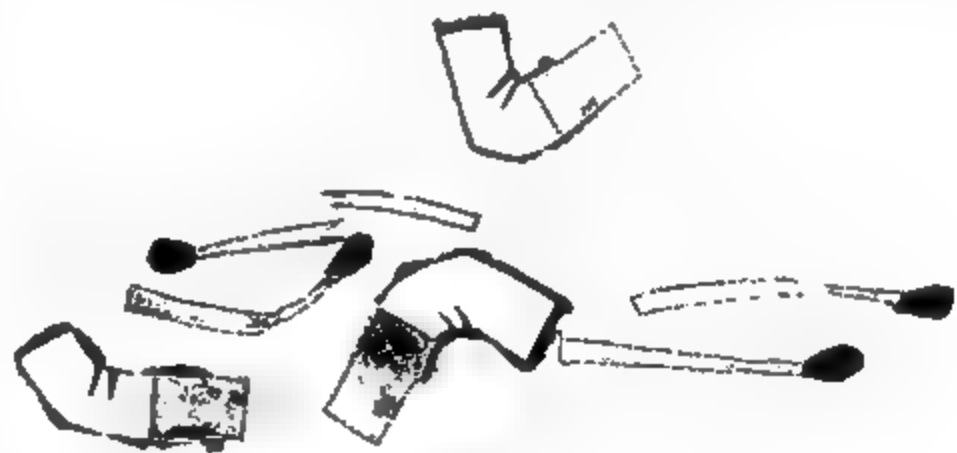
"Hmm? Then why think of a divorce at all?" he asked, softly. "It's all so... so unnecessary. Let's continue as before, you and I. What do you say?"

"Just think it over. Calmly That will help you see things clearly."

The cigarette glowed at the tip. He drew in deeply and blew out

blew out a dense cloud of smoke. In between the fumes of the cigarette, he noticed some images now, dimly. The images looked somewhat faded.

Her face. It stared back at him, dry-eyed. Even when he slapped her hard, he could not draw tears out of those eyes. Sharp eyes that penetrated him, wordlessly. Chél is she a woman at all? There she was, unredeemed by the femininity of tears. Let me provoke her some more, he thought, let me see if she would hit me in return so that I can promptly turn around and lay the blame squarely on her. But when he beat her more harshly, she had just pushed his hand away.



through his lips. A cloud of smoke surrounded his face fully. When he looked through the smoke-screen, he could sense the eyes of the people on him. The people sitting at other tables were glancing at him discreetly. He inhaled again and

And with great strength too. She never once lost her equanimity. With hands that were as firm as they were strong, she pushed him out of her way and left the room. The familiar look of chilling remoteness that he so often



recognised, would settle in her eyes. They dismissed him, those distant eyes. You're despicable, said those eyes. You just don't count at all, they said, erasing him out of sight. He was enraged by that. Being a woman, why doesn't she plead with me to accept her, despite everything?

Such things did not exist for her. Instead, she had made a neat blueprint for her future, with a thoughtful eye to every detail and with that she had slipped away to some far-off point, beyond reach. She had made arrangements for her accommodation in a hostel, for she wished to pursue her studies. She had her parents who had readily agreed to this divorce, she had her lawyer who was going to effectively win the case for her and she was generally surrounded by her colleagues, her sympathetic relations and friends. He was disconcerted by the way she faced up to any problem with courage, the way she could be stable, without losing her cool. He was truly upset by her style, for it unfailingly registered a sharp intelligence in every action of hers, in every word. She had this poise. It unnerved him. For she had a way of carrying herself with a confidence without ever losing or sacrificing her innate sense of modesty. His hands would then itch to crush her bones, to beat her

"I really want to keep you happy. But by running away like this, you're not giving me a chance. What can I do under these circumstances?"

.....
He dipped the finger chips in the tomato ketchup and put it into his mouth. He poured out the steaming coffee into a cup and slowly sipped at it:

"Listen to me. Even now it's not too late. You can still save the situation, if you cooperate. Withdraw your application for divorce from the court. What do you say?"

.....
"Alright? It is but normal for any husband and wife to have a hundred differences between them. It's normal for them to fight over issues. That's what makes the relationship truly sacred. Can't you be magnanimous enough to forgive me for the mistakes that happened in the past, an educated girl like yourself? Aha! At last there's a smile on your face. So you agree."

.....
"I know. I know very well indeed, that you'll eventually listen to reason. That you won't make me lose my face by this awful thing called 'divorce'. Good!"

"Sir."

"Yes?"

"Would you like to have anything more, Sir?"

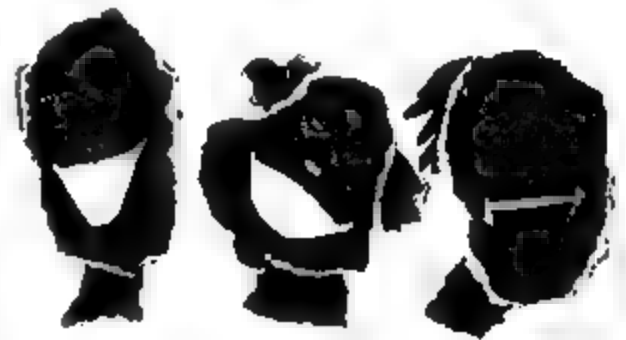
"Hey, why are you pestering me like this? I didn't order for anything more now, did I?"

"No, of course not Sir. But the plates on your table are empty, so I..."

"So what? Do you think I should keep on ordering for more food? Are you trying to drive me out of this restaurant?" he asked in an altered voice. For one who had been talking in a low tone all the time, he now raised his voice till he could feel the eyes of the people at the tables around him. They seemed to be watching him keenly.

"Oh no Sir! Please do pardon me. I wasn't trying to drive you out, not at all. Since you were talking for so long, all by yourself, I thought I could perhaps get you a cool drink. That's all, Sir."

He pulled out his wallet and paid for the bill. The waiter stood for a while, looking at the man who was walking out of the restaurant. He laughed aloud. The people sitting at the other tables now joined in and laughed freely. A couple of them who did not join in the laughter raised their brows thoughtfully. A few others shrugged their shoulders and concentrated once more on their plate.



Taken from the author's collection: Parijata and Other Stories.





Prince Charles and Lady Diana visit India

TEXT ■ POONAM THAKUR

PHOTOGRAPHS ■ PHAL S. GIROTA

Britain's Royal Couple, Prince Charles and Lady Diana, recently paid an official visit to India. Besides calling on the President, the Vice President and the Prime Minister, they also vis-

ited Mrs. Sonia Gandhi.

While Lady Diana visited the Taj Mahal in Agra, the Prince addressed meetings of the Indo-British Industrial Forum and the Bharat Yuva Shakti Trust, an organisation styled on the Prince's Youth Business Trust in Britain



Prince Charles at the Jamia Hamdard New Delhi.



Lady Diana at the Taj...

which aims at providing self-employment opportunities to underprivileged youth.

During her visit to the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture, Lady Diana won many a heart with her heart-warming smile and down-to-earth style. She inaugu-

rated the Marie Stopes clinic at Agra, visited the Jamia Hamdard Majeedia Hospital – well known its work in traditional systems of medicine – and raced through the crowded streets of Calcutta. She was at her likeable best at the Mother Teresa's home for the aged,



...And at a social gathering.

the destitute and the diseased in Calcutta. She expressed her gratitude to the people of Calcutta who had come out in large numbers to welcome her.

Prince Charles played a polo match in Jaipur on the invitation of Bubbles Bhiwani Singh, the Maha-

raja of Jaipur, while Lady Diana watched from the spectators' gallery. Prince Charles' team won the match and Lady Diana was asked to present the trophy. At the end of the visit, Lady Diana returned to Britain while the Prince stayed back to go trekking in the Himalayas. ♦



Peep into Delhi's old Mansions

■ LAILA TYABJI

By a curious coincidence, the review copy of Pavan K. Varma's *Mansions At Dusk - The Havelis of Old Delhi* was delivered at our door just as a newly arrived visitor to Delhi was being reproached by my father for finding it a crass and unattractive place. "How can you not like Delhi," he asked her, "Have you no sense of history?"

History is indeed all around us. When the Emperor Shahjehan built the Old Delhi of Pavan Varma's book it was already the seventh of Delhi's different incarnations, with Lutyen's Imperial Raj Delhi yet to follow. It is one of the magics of contemporary Delhi that round every corner - however drably institutional or crudely commercial - a glimpse of those older Delhis - legendary Indraprastha, Lal Kot, Quila Rai

Pithora, Siri, Jahanpana, Tughlakabad - lingers on.

A bureaucrat can step from his matchbox flat in Bharti Nagar into the sculptured green silences of the Lodi gardens; the elegant abstract rhomboids and soaring triangles of Maharaja Jai Singh's Jantar Mantar mock the unimaginative cement high-rise of Central Delhi; the serene stone of Feroze Shah Tughlak's pillared and moated 13th Century Hauz Khas provides a refuge for shoppers from the adjoining glitterati boutiques; the bizarre plywood aberrations of the Trade Fair State Pavilions are flanked by the austere beautiful battlements of the Purana Quila Fort.

The fast food joints, Benetton branches and Marutis with singing horns of video-culture, yuppieland New Delhi suburbia may seem a far cry from the Lodi and the Tughlak Sultanates, and



brash 'Def Col', 'South Ex', and 'G.K. II' lack the evocative appeal of Chandni Chowk (Moonlight Square) and Phool Ki Mandi (Market of Flowers) but there too the Dollops icecream van stands in the shadow of a 12th century domed tomb; blue jeans are framed by a fragment of arched collonade.

These fragments are not just stone and stucco; they tell a story and are part of our subconscious genetic past. *Mansions At Dusk* is about one such fast evanescing of

stones - the havelis of Shahjehanabad or Old Delhi and, through them, the extraordinary lives of the extraordinary people who lived in them. It was also an extraordinary and significant time; two major cultural streams, Mughal and British met, intermingled and cross fertilised the great Hindu traditions of North India, creating a new culture in their wake, influencing music, theosophy, literature, dance, fashion, art and architecture. It also saw the beginnings of a new

middle class with lifestyles that were a synthesis of all three strands, and a buying power that enabled them to invest and indulge in temporal as well as spiritual things. In *Mansions At Dusk* Sondeep Shankar hauntingly photographs the gaping skeletons of some of the few remaining houses and Pavan Varma fleshes them out with stories of their inhabitants. We encounter the beautiful Begum Samru, sold as a slave to a French mercenary, who rose to become the "beloved





daughter" of Shah Alam II; dashing soldier, James Skinner; Zeenuth Mahal, Royal favourite, seductive but perfidious; Charles Metcalfe calling for his white kid gloves to pinch the ears of a recalcitrant servant; Ghalib's patron, Hakim Ajanullah Khan, and a host of others, captured in an ambience of *mujra* and *mushaira*, Persian carpets and Venetian chandeliers, pigeon flying and the scent of *atar* (perfume).

Even now the *kuchas* and *mohallas* of Old Delhi have some

of that quality of life, subtle and undefinable. Paper kites crisscrossing the evening sky; fruit and vegetables arranged in formal, tiered, colour-coordinated pyramids; *jalebis* and *kababs* prepared on the street in giant, spluttering sizzling *karhais* instead of sanitized Wimpy Bar Kitchens; sales conducted by itinerant street criers rather than neon hoardings; horse carriages replacing city transport buses in the winding cobbled lanes. A street-culture that combines paan, poetry, perfumes

and salty repartee.

It is essential that as a nation, we show greater concern and sensitivity for the preservation of our rich architectural treasure.

A few palaces, forts and temples are officially protected and maintained by the Archaeological Survey. Even in this area, there is room for improvement. However, *Havelis* and the other living space of ordinary mortals do not qualify and are therefore most vulnerable to the developer's bulldozer. As a result, we are losing not only a